

## Relations industrielles Industrial Relations



Paul BERNSTEIN : *Workplace Democratization. Its Internal Dynamics*. New Brunswick, Transaction Books, 1983, 133 pp., ISBN 0-87855-711-3

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Volume 41, numéro 3, 1986

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/050248ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/050248ar>

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### Éditeur(s)

Département des relations industrielles de l'Université Laval

### ISSN

0034-379X (imprimé)

1703-8138 (numérique)

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### Citer ce compte rendu

Matejko, A. J. (1986). Compte rendu de [Paul BERNSTEIN : *Workplace Democratization. Its Internal Dynamics*. New Brunswick, Transaction Books, 1983, 133 pp., ISBN 0-87855-711-3]. *Relations industrielles / Industrial Relations*, 41(3), 667–668. <https://doi.org/10.7202/050248ar>

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On balance, however, Canadian industrial relations specialists ought to dash out and buy this book. Undoubtedly they will find in it much with which to quarrel, but they will profit from the encounter.

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**Group Process. An Introduction to Group Dynamics**, by Joseph Luft, Alto, Cal.: Mayfield Publishing Company, 1984, XII + 237 pp., 3rd edition, ISBN 0-87484-542-4

Basic dilemmas are fundamental to all groups. They include such questions as: control of members but avoidance of group membership becoming in attractive to them, good communication between various levels without sacrificing the goal attainment, socialization without too much suppression of individual initiative, effective role playing but avoidance of formulization. However, general group problems have only a limited validity and more may be achieved by gaining awareness of cultural and existential conditioning of people within *specific* groups. Within the individualistically oriented civilization group is a coalition serving people who remain members as long as this suits them for a variety of reasons. Within collectivistically oriented civilizations people perceive their own destiny through the microcosm of their 'reference group' and act in the fulfilment of specific duties. Situations of imminent danger brings people more together than situations of safety, which allow us to ignore others and concentrate on our own immediate affairs.

The group experience, reduced to only one civilization and ignoring the existential conditioning of human behaviour, excludes a universal perspective. This is exactly the shortcoming of this book which is supposed to present group dynamics but identifies the latter with the U.S. middle class world. Group morale based on pleasing everybody remains at a much more superficial level than the morale of committed people ready willingly or unwillingly, to fulfill a task of a major existential importance: rescue somebody, achieve jointly something very important, etc. Conflicts based on personal malaccommodation are much different from the conflicts arising from a foreign civilizational affiliation or a deep ideological commitment, Luft in his book does not pay attention to these dimensions; he is perfectly satisfied with a uncivilizational perspective and reduces the small group problems to the US middle class trivialities. For example he claims that «all relationships are confidential, unless explicitly modified» (p. 27) without acknowledging that this is actually valid to some cultures, and in other cultures the opposite may be true.

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**Workplace Democratization. Its Internal Dynamics**, by Paul Bernstein, New Brunswick, N.J., Transaction Books, 1983, 133 pp., ISBN 0-87855-711-3

The process of work democratization is a complicated enterprise in which the awareness of various interfering factors is of a great strategic importance. On the basis of a substantial case material, the author identifies the following crucial components: participation in decision-making (does there exist means for getting one's views frequently into decision-making bodies?), economic return to the participants based on the surplus they produce (are there any

tangible rewards to the participant, for his/her extra effort and for the benefits accruing to the company?), sharing management level information with employees (is this information available and made clear to all interested persons?), guaranteed individual rights (are there guarantees to protect critical speech and organizing among the employees?), an independent appeals system (in case of reprisal or dispute, is there a trustworthy system for fair appeal?), and a complex participatory/democratic consciousness (are people able and willing to attach themselves to the common good and multiply it by joint effort?).

It is not easy to reconcile self-reliance with receptivity to others' needs, individualism with loyalty to others, activism with obedience to the common will, authority with participation, economic goals (profit) with social goals (community). «Democratization is unlikely to survive if only the managers understand democracy. They must be held to democratic practice by the managed». (p. 103)

The success of work democratization operates through a positive or reinforcing cycle against a negative or extinguishing cycle. The latter appears when the components of democratization (above mentioned) are not available and the employees face too many rejections of their attempts at participation (p. 112). The model offered by Bernstein is a developmental one. In the case of the lack of any one of six components mentioned above «either the firm must alter the system and adopt a new component — the relevant missing one(s) — to give the employees more rights and power — or the firm may abort the attempt at democratization because management is unwilling to accept any expansion of workers' power, or because the workers themselves do not feel capable of more responsibility and power» (p. 117).

Democratization at work needs to be cultivated and constantly reinforced in order to provide a genuine humanitarian content into the existing structures. «Democratization cannot function well until the workers themselves want it» (p. 117). Several variables are required, generating simultaneously within certain specified ranges in order to promote a genuine democratization. Involvement of workers in the collective participation in management in order to succeed needs to be a satisfactory answer to several existential problems of real importance and not just a doctrine of an abstract nature. Even the best will of reformers cannot assure success as long as a gap remains between intentions of the promoters and the expectations of the employees. The model proposed by Bernstein offers some useful suggestions to anybody involved in the process of work democratization.

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### TROIS ÉTUDES DE GRÈVES COMPARÉES

#### INTRODUCTION

Rares sont les monographies consacrées aux conflits de travail. Aussi n'y a-t-il que plus d'intérêt à s'attarder sur le peu qui a été publié au fil des ans. Ainsi voulons-nous revenir sur trois études consacrées à trois grèves célèbres au Québec: Asbestos 1949, Noranda 1953-54 et United Aircraft 1974-75.

Nous voulons aussi comparer les conflits entre eux et en relever les principales différences et ressemblances. Dans les trois cas, il s'agit de conflits très longs, impliquant des multinationa-